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The TAIL End



Keep Your Eye On The Prize

by Emily Volman

I'd been taking our dog, Josie, to agility classes for over a year. She seemed to be a natural at the obstacles and break-neck turns. She was also fast and listened to direction. But Josie had one weakness: Daddy. My husband is often on the road, so whenever he came to watch classes, Josie would make a beeline for him. In the end, Josie's skill level when Daddy was *not* there always overshadowed her Attention Deficit Disorder when he was. As we entered our second year of classes, the trainer encouraged us to enter Josie in a competition. After much discussion, we decided it was worth a try. What could happen?

On the day of the big event, my husband, Josie and I gathered up water, the video camera and treats galore and headed to the park. We checked in with the officials, Josie and I got the eighth spot in the line up, and then time passed slowly as we waited for our turn. Meanwhile, my husband and I devised a plan: he would pretend he was leaving the park when the fifth team started, complete with our goodbye-comfort-phrase, "Be right back!" Then he'd hide somewhere and videotape the fun. Perfect plan!

Finally, they called for Number Eight. I took a big breath. This was it. Our trainer was watching. Our classmates were watching. A bunch of strangers and "real" agility competitors were watching. My husband was watching...from somewhere.

We walked up to the starting line. I bent down and gave Josie a little pep talk while rubbing her face. "Are you ready?," I said in that voice that says *Look how excited I am! This means food is in your future!* I slowly took her leash off as she sat patiently waiting for the "okay." I walked to the first obstacle in order to get far enough ahead of her to keep up. She waited. So far, so good.

I looked at her. She looked at me. We were ready.

I shouted, "Okay!" and—just as planned—she came barreling at me, took the first jump

and...ran right out of the course. She ran frantically throughout the on-lookers. I tried to call her back in my happiest *I have food* voice, practically throwing the treats at her, but she didn't even look back. Now, as you may have seen in other competitive situations involving canines, officials usually frown upon loose dogs running wild around other contained dogs. They started yelling at me to "get control of your dog!" Then they yelled at each other—things like, "We cannot continue until we have this animal under control!" Yes, control my dog—but you see, she's clearly just stressed! Have pity on us! We're new! I was panicked for Josie's safety, yet I simultaneously wanted to pass out in embarrassment.

Wait. Suddenly, it dawned on me. She's looking for Daddy! *Where's Daddy?*

He was, of course, hiding and filming every moment, just like we'd planned. And, yes, we have the tape. Josie *does* look like a crazed animal, being followed by a woman running in circles, screaming and waving meat products in the air.

The best part of that tape is where I really start letting my husband have it...in front of everyone...even though I had no idea where he was.

After some of my even more embarrassing flailing and shrieking, my husband appeared and Josie ran right to him.

The agility officials quickly moved on to the next team and had nothing further to say to us. My husband and I slinked to our car with our tails between our legs, while Josie happily pranced beside us, tail wagging high in the air. To her, she had just won the best ribbon anyone could offer: Daddy. And at that very moment, I think that even a twelve-inch sausage link would have gone unnoticed.

Nah, you're right.



Emily Volman lives in Franklin with her husband and two dogs, Josie and Jasper.